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# THE PROGRESS OF NATIONS

*The day will come  
when nations will be judged  
not by their military or economic strength,  
nor by the splendour of their capital  
cities and public buildings,  
but by the well-being of their peoples:  
by their levels of health, nutrition and education;  
by their opportunities to earn a fair reward for their  
labours; by their ability to participate in the  
decisions that affect their lives; by the respect that is  
shown for their civil and political liberties;  
by the provision that is made for those who are  
vulnerable and disadvantaged;  
and by the protection that is afforded to the  
growing minds and bodies of their children.  
The Progress of Nations, published annually  
by the United Nations Children's Fund, is  
a contribution towards that day.*

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Commentaries represent the personal views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect UNICEF policy.

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## Foreword

**T**he *Progress of Nations* is a clarion call for children. It asks every nation on earth to examine its progress towards the achievable goals set at the World Summit for Children in 1990 and to undertake an honest appraisal of where it has succeeded and where it is falling behind.

This year's report highlights successes attained and challenges remaining in efforts to register each child at birth, to immunize every child on earth and to help adolescents, particularly girls, as they set out on the path towards adulthood. With its clear league tables, *The Progress of Nations* is an objective scorecard on these issues. Commentaries by leading thinkers and doers stress the need for an approach to development based on child rights, calling on governments to fulfil the promises they made in ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

*The Progress of Nations* reminds us annually that rhetoric about children must be backed up with action. I would commend it to anyone concerned about the status of our most vulnerable citizens.



Kofi A. Annan  
Secretary-General  
United Nations

# Introduction: Championing children's rights

**E**ach year, *The Progress of Nations* ranks countries, not by the traditional yardstick of economic growth, but by the well-being of their children. One might expect the richest nations to be at the top of the class when it comes to providing for children. But the report confirms that monetary progress does not guarantee social development.

In fact, some of the most impoverished nations are making the greatest strides towards achieving the goals set at the 1990 World Summit for Children. Why? Because they have made fulfilling the basic needs of children a priority.

Charity is no longer enough. With only two holdouts preventing universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the community of nations is rapidly coming to grips with the fact that each and every child is entitled to a whole series of fundamental rights.

In recognition of that shift in thinking, *The Progress of Nations* is also expanding its focus. This year, for the first time, we look at children's civil rights, beginning at the beginning: with the right to be registered at birth. For millions of children, the lack of birth registration means exclusion from the rights and privileges a nation offers its citizens, such as education and health care.

This year's report also charts the dramatic progress in child immunization over the past 20 years, a legacy of which we can be proud. But the struggle is far from over: 2 million children still die each year because they lack access to this basic and inexpensive public health service.

*The Progress of Nations 1998* points out that society has largely overlooked the vulnerabilities of adolescence in developing countries — and that young people, who make up one sixth of the people on earth, need the support of their elders if they are to fulfil their promise and avoid the inevitable perils that lie ahead.



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In addition, this year's report outlines the growing shame of homelessness in the richest countries, where there is an ominous rise in the proportion of families and young people lacking permanent shelter.

The gains made on behalf of children in the past half-century were scarcely imaginable when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed in 1948. As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of that historic document, we must rededicate ourselves to ensuring that the rights set out in the Declaration and the galaxy of human rights instruments that have flowed from it — including the Convention on the Rights of the Child — are fulfilled for every child.

Carol Bellamy  
Executive Director  
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